Lesson Two: Introducing Arabic Words

PRINCIPLE ONE

The Arabic alphabet consists of twenty-nine letters and three short vowels (*figure 2.1*). This text assumes that the reader is familiar with the alphabet and its short vowels.

PRINCIPLE TWO

Most Arabic words are formed from three base letters. These three letters join together to establish a meaning. For example, the base letters ك–ت–ب (*read from right to left*) express the meaning of "to write."

PRINCIPLE THREE

The letters ف-ع-ل are used as model base letters.[4] The first letter is called the "*fā'* (ف) position." The second is called the "'*ain* (ع) position." The third is called the "*lām* (ل) position." The base letters ف-ع-ل express the meaning of "to do."

PRINCIPLE FOUR

Most Arabic nouns and verbs are derived by placing the three base letters on designated patterns. These patterns involve voweling[5] the base letters and often require the addition of non-base letters. Each of these patterns reflects the meaning of the base letters in a unique way. For example, the pattern فَاعِل describes a person who enacts the meaning of the base letters.[6] This pattern involves voweling the *fa'* (ف) position

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[4] The letters ف–ع–ل are used throughout the text to illustrate verb and noun patterns.

[5] *Voweling* refers to the addition of the short vowels: *dammah, fathah*, and *kasrah*.

[6] The English language also makes use of patterns. Consider, for example, the word "teacher." Adding the suffix "er" to the verb *teach* produces the word "teacher." This pattern describes a person who enacts the meaning of the verb (i.e., one who teaches). Similarly, consider additional English words that follow this pattern, such as "builder" (one who builds) and "thinker" (one who thinks).

with a *fathah*, adding an ‘*alif*, and voweling the ‘*ain* (ع) position with a *kasrah*. If the base letters ك–ت–ب (*to write*) replace the *fā’* (ف), ‘*ain* (ع), and *lām* (ل) positions in this pattern, the word كَاتِب (*one who writes*) is formed (*figure 2.2*). Similarly, replacing the *fā’* (ف), ‘*ain* (ع), and *lām* (ل) positions with the base letters ع–ب–د (*to worship*) forms the word عَابِد (*one who worships*).

THE ARABIC ALPHABET

ج *JĪM*	ث *THĀ'*	ت *TĀ'*	ب *BĀ'*	ا *'ALIF*
ر *RĀ'*	ذ *DHĀL*	د *DĀL*	خ *KHĀ'*	ح *HĀ'*
ض *DHĀD*	ص *SĀD*	ش *SHĪN*	س *SĪN*	ز *ZĀ'*
ف *FĀ'*	غ *GHAIN*	ع *'AIN*	ظ *ZHĀ'*	ط *THĀ'*
ن *NŪN*	م *MĪM*	ل *LĀM*	ك *KĀF*	ق *QĀF*
	ء *HAMZAH*	ى *YĀ'*	و *WĀW*	ه *HĀ'*

THE ARABIC SHORT VOWELS

ِ *KASRAH*	َ *FATHAH*	ُ *DAMMAH*

FIGURE 2.1

THE ARABIC ALPHABET AND ITS SHORT VOWELS

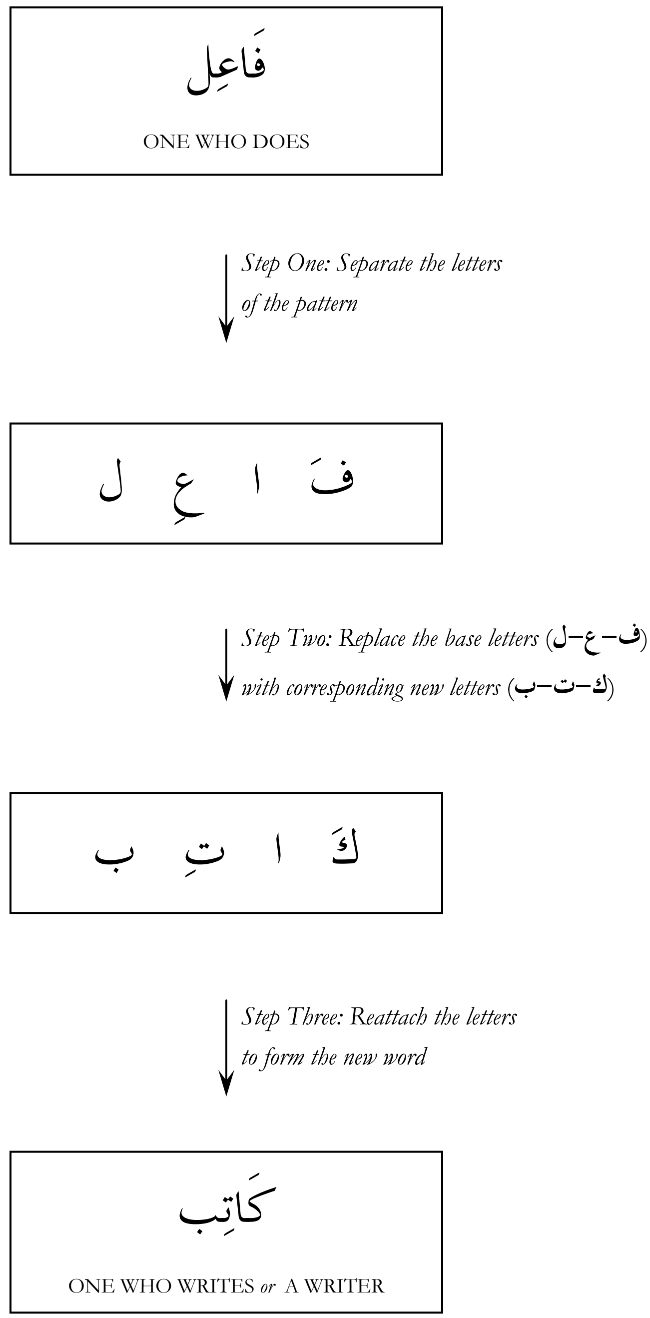


FIGURE 2.2

FORMING WORDS FROM BASE LETTERS